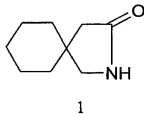


**Amendments to the Claims:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

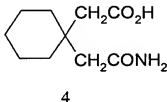
**LISTING OF CLAIMS:**

1. (Currently Amended) An improved process for the preparation of gabalactam of the formula 1



which comprises

- (i) ~~P~~**preparing** an aqueous solution of an alkali or alkaline earth metal hydroxide in a concentration ranging from 10 to 20% by weight, adding bromine to the resulting solution to give the appropriate alkali or alkaline earth metal hypobromite solution having a concentration ranging from 5 to 10% by weight,
- (ii) adding 1 part by weight of an amide of the formula 4



- to 7.5 to 9.5 parts by weight, of the solution of the alkali/alkaline earth metal hypobromite obtained in step (i) during a period in the range of 1 to 4 hours, at a temperature in the range of -10 to + 10 degrees C,
- (iii) ~~K~~**keeping** the resultant mixture for ageing in the temperature in the range of -10 to +10 degrees C for a period in the range of 0.5 to 2 hours,
- (iv) ~~H~~**heating** the mixture gradually to a temperature in the range of 80 to 100 degrees C, for a period in the range of 3 to 8 hours and aging for 5 to 8 hours,
- (v) ~~C~~**ooling** the reaction mixture to a temperature in the range of 30 to 50 degrees C,
- (vi) ~~E~~**xtracting** the mixture using a nonpolar solvent or a mixture thereof,

- (vii) subjecting the resulting ~~organic-layer-washed~~ aqueous layer to the steps of ~~(iii)~~ (iv) to (v) defined above,
  - (viii) ~~C~~ombining the organic layers obtained in steps (vi) & (vii) together,
  - (ix) washing resulting combined organic layers with water at a temperature in the range of 30 to 35 degrees C and
  - (x) ~~D~~istilling of the organic solvent at a temperature in the range of 60 to 110 deg degrees C, under reduced pressure.
2. (Currently Amended) An improved process as claimed in claim 1 wherein in ~~the~~ step (i) the alkali metal ~~used is — an alkali~~ hydroxide, ~~more preferably is~~ sodium hydroxide.
  3. (Currently Amended) An improved process as claimed in claim 1 wherein in ~~the~~ step (i) the concentration of the alkali / alkaline earth metal hydroxide solution is in a range from 10 to 15% more preferably 12.5%.
  4. (Currently Amended) An improved process as claimed in claim 1 wherein ~~in~~ the concentration of the hypobromite is in the range of 5 to 8 % and more preferably 7% by weight.
  5. (Previously Presented) An improved process as claimed in claim 1 wherein the amount of hypobromite added is in the range of 8 to 9 parts, more preferably 8.5 to 9 parts of the solution of sodium hypobromite.
  6. (Currently Amended) An improved process as claimed in claim 1 wherein the addition is effected performed during a period ranging ~~form from~~ 1 to 3 hours, more preferably 1 to 2 hours.
  7. (Currently Amended) An improved process as claimed in claim 1 wherein the temperature employed during the addition is maintained at preferably -5 to +5 degrees C, more preferably -5 to 0 degrees C.

8. (Currently Amended) An improved process as claimed in claim 1 wherein the aging of the reaction mixture is ~~effected~~ performed at a temperature in the range of -5 to ~~-0~~ 0 degrees C, preferably for a period in the range of 0.5 to 1.5 ~~hrs~~ hours and more preferably for 1 ~~hr~~ hour.
9. (Currently Amended) An improved process as claimed in claim 1 wherein in ~~the~~ step (iii) the heating is ~~effected~~ performed preferably at a temperature in the range of 80 to 90 degrees C, more preferably 80 to 85 degrees C.
10. (Currently Amended) An improved process as claimed in claim 9 wherein the heating is ~~effected~~ performed during a period of 4 to 6 hours, more preferably for 4 hours.
11. (Currently Amended) An improved process as claimed in claim 1 wherein the cooling is ~~effected~~ performed to a temperature in the range of 35 to 45 degrees C, more preferably 40 degrees C.
12. (Currently Amended) An improved process as claimed in claim 1 wherein the extraction is done using an aliphatic or aromatic ~~hydrocarbon~~ nonpolar solvent such as ethylene dichloride, methylene dichloride, hexane and toluene and more preferably an aromatic nonpolar solvent like toluene.
13. (Currently Amended) An improved process as claimed in claim 1 wherein the ~~organic solvent-extracted~~ aqueous layer is once again heated to a temperature in the range of 80 to 100 degrees C during a period of 3 to 8 ~~hrs~~ hours, aged for 5 to 8 ~~hrs~~ hours cooled and re-extracted with toluene.
14. (Currently Amended) An improved process as claimed in claim 1 wherein the combined organic layers is treated with charcoal for removing any coloring matter present in it.

15. (Currently Amended) An improved process as claimed in claim 1 wherein the distilling of the organic solvent is done preferably between 60 to 90 degrees C and more preferably between 60 to 65 degrees C under reduced pressure.